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President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 44

Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers

Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/387)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.28)

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Lesotho to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.28.

Mr. Mangoaela (Lesotho): At the end of the twentieth century, the year 2000 problem (Y2K) threatened computers and digital systems around the world. Left unaddressed, Y2K would have seriously disrupted vital financial, business, health and government services and could have interrupted electricity and telecommunications. While primary responsibility for addressing the problem rested with each organization delivering the service, a unique international cooperative effort was organized to provide mutual assistance among the Member States of the United Nations. As a result, the world entered the twenty-first century experiencing only minor Y2K problems. Draft resolution A/55/L.28 captures the success that was that unique international initiative.

Because the most critical aspects of Y2K were addressed successfully, the full extent of the threat it posed to everyday life will never be known. However, in the late 1990s a broad consensus emerged that Y2K could cause at least four serious problems. First, Y2K failures could cause serious social and economic harm. Computer software and hardware that supported financial processes, ranging from global financial flows, to government payrolls and benefits, to small business inventories, were highly vulnerable because of the extensive use of dates in those systems. Y2K-induced errors could cause many of those systems to stop working entirely.

Secondly, public overreaction to Y2K fears could cause serious hardships. Fears that supply chains would be disrupted could cause hoarding of scarce commodities, such as pharmaceuticals. Fear that the financial system would not be ready for Y2K could cause a run on banks. Developing countries were particularly at risk with regard to potential panic selling of investments perceived as risky and the disruption of their tourist industries. Although a few dislocations did occur, no real panic ensued, because people believed correctly that the world was ready for Y2K.

The third risk was a political one. Y2K failures or panic lasting more than a few days could cause political instability. Indeed, the importance of maintaining public confidence in the Y2K preparations became the preoccupation of the global Y2K team in the last months of 1999.

Fourthly, widespread serious computer problems would likely reduce public confidence in information technology, slowing growth in that industry and

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potentially derailing technology-led economic growth world-wide.

Beyond those risks, however, Y2K offered a variety of valuable opportunities to the world. Among nations, it presented an opportunity to create and test a new form of organization — the first "virtual" international organization — to address a global problem. Y2K was seen as a common menace that threatened every country. Economic and security interdependence meant that no country was an island. The problem's clear-cut nature and unyielding deadline gave urgency and clarity to the work. Sharing of information about workable approaches to the problem and about progress towards readiness became paramount. That environment fostered the creation of an agile but official mechanism to validate and share quality information around the world.

It is against this background that I recommend to this Assembly the adoption by consensus of draft resolution A/55/L.28.

Mr. Stuart (Australia): Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's report evaluating the outcome of the steps taken in the United Nations system and by Member States to resolve the problems of the year 2000 date conversion for computers. My delegation would also like to acknowledge and applaud the efforts of the Permanent Representative of Lesotho, one of the leaders in this field.

The Secretary-General's report contains a lot of good news, and, as is often the case with success stories of the United Nations, this good news does not seem to have attracted much attention. My delegation would like today to highlight some of the benefits derived from the concerted and intensive approach, nationally and internationally, aimed at managing the so-called "millennium bug". We also want to draw out some of the lessons learned from our Y2K experience. I shall focus largely on Australia's experience but do so acknowledging not only that many other countries have their own success stories to recount, but also that the United Nations system's own efforts deserve recognition.

The Y2K problem arose because programmers entered dates in computer code without reference to the century. That may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but the expediency of reducing the cost of storing computer data overlooked the longer-term costs of ensuring that programmes would run after 31 December 1999. With the approach of the centenary year, computer users, and the many more who relied on computer systems, began to focus increasingly sharply on the prospect that computer systems might recognize the year 2000 — represented in computer code by the two digits "00" — as the year 1900.

As far back as 1997, the Australian Government was convinced that Y2K was a real threat. The potential economic impact, security risks and consequences of inaction called for a pro-active role in countering that threat by stringent testing, remedial measures and contingency planning.

The written version of our statement, which has been circulated, provides a summary of the institutional, policy and financial dimensions of the Australian Government's response. In short, by September 1999, the Australian Government was confident enough to adopt a "business as usual" approach to the critical date change period. This confidence proved to have not been misplaced.

By mid-December 1999, it was announced that all Australian Federal Government agencies were Y2K-compliant. This task involved testing almost 3,500 systems in over two and a half years at a cost of over half a billion dollars in Australian terms. A similar process of testing and taking remedial measures occurred across our private sector.

Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Australian Federal Government departments reported only three minor incidents. These were assessed as low or very low impact because the problems were fixed within a very short time. The Australian private sector reported a low number of incidents. The same pattern was evident internationally — no systemic disruption, but some concrete glitches. The Secretary-General's report states that, in the first place, within the United Nations system a similarly thorough approach to Y2K readiness produced a similar result — in essence, no serious problems. In the second place, reporting from units around the world to the United Nations showed no significant Y2K disruption.

Y2K was the first global challenge attributed to information technology. By its nature, it required effective action against an immutable deadline. Unaddressed, it had the potential to cause serious

disruption to key services around the globe. International networks of cooperation, information sharing and teamwork proved a unique success, with many examples of nations' sharing information and cooperating with those nations less technologically advanced.

In Australia's case, we provided technical assistance to Pacific rim nations through the Agency for International Development. The Y2K Project Office also shared and disseminated information about Australia's preparedness with other countries. Our Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade monitored international Y2K issues and, through its overseas posts, offered information-sharing arrangements with regional and global agencies and offices. Australia was also an active participant in the arrangements established by the United Nations itself, including the International Y2K Cooperation Centre and the work of the United Nations Joint Situation Centre.

My delegation believes that we can draw a lot from the way that the Y2K challenge was met. Some of the lessons learned relate to our national experience. For one thing, Y2K induced Australians to review and improve their understanding of society's reliance on, and hence its potential vulnerability to, computerized systems. It prompted greater awareness of the redundancy and inefficiency of systems in use. Organizations had to take stock of their technological assets and identify mission-critical systems. Business and Government organizations — and, as noted in the Secretary-General's report, United Nations bodies — developed contingency plans for system failure. Through the Y2K compliance exercise, organizations took the opportunity to upgrade their systems as a cost-effective way of removing constraints inherent in their existing environment. The resulting boost to our technological infrastructure enhanced Australia's position in the digital economy and positioned Australians to take greater advantage of e-commerce and on-line market opportunities into the future.

Cooperation between the public and private sectors was enhanced in the face of a common, immutable and unique threat. Australia also used the Y2K exercise to improve coordination of our emergency response mechanisms. As was the case with many other countries, this resulted in Australia's emerging from the potential threat of failures with a greater understanding of how different areas of our society can communicate and work together effectively.

Internationally, we can also draw on some positive outcomes. We were conscious of becoming part of a wider process, a global partnership, through the Year 2000 Project Office. This underscored the benefits of information-sharing, coordinated responses and transparent and comprehensive information dissemination.

While some nations embarked on preparations to minimize potential Y2K disruptions with years to prepare, late-starting nations benefited from the knowledge acquired by the early starters through information-sharing. Such cooperation provided a framework for multilateral mutual assistance in a way that demonstrated that public/private and cross-border transactions and interactions could work positively for common benefit.

We can reasonably conclude that the nations which shared information and conducted self-reporting exercises on Y2K in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation are all the more likely to work together in the future, facing similar challenges. The Y2K experience may be viewed as a wake-up call. It alerted many of us to our reliance on computer systems and it also forced the public sector and industry and, with the United Nations assistance, the developed and the developing countries to work together under the pressure of an immutable deadline. It also showed the potential for more effective avenues of communication, both domestically and internationally. Y2K was not simply an information-technology issue — it was a challenge to the way we live our daily lives in those parts of the world that have come to depend on computer systems and it was a challenge that saw the world unite for the common good. This was indeed an encouraging start to our new century.

Mr. Sotirov (Bulgaria): On behalf of the Bulgarian delegation, I am pleased to reaffirm Bulgarian support for the activities undertaken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve the Y2K problem. My delegation would also like to convey its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on the evaluation of the outcome of the steps taken to address the so-called "millennium bug".

I wish also to congratulate the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics and its Chairman, Ambassador Percy Mangoaela, for the excellent work they have done. We appreciate all the Organization's efforts to manage the year 2000 issue. My Government

also highly values the support provided to the countries in transition provided by the dissemination of relevant information on funding possibilities, the guidelines summarizing best practices for assessing Y2K and establishing contingency plans on the national and international levels.

As regional Coordinator for the Central and Eastern European and Central Asian countries, Bulgaria has attached great importance to enhancing cooperation in order to insure a timely and effective response to the challenge and to work together with its neighbours to address the threats the problem could pose.

The regional Y2K cooperation centre has received significant aid and support for national and regional initiatives from the United Nations Development Programme. It promoted increased strategic cooperation and action among Governments, peoples and the private sector to identify and correct potential adverse effects of the year 2000 compliance issue on both society and economy. The regional group undertook several preventive measures to achieve coordination and communication among countries. It established a mechanism for the dissemination of information concerning the problem and created and maintained a comprehensive Web site receiving over 8,900 hits. Three regional conferences and a workshop of national Coordinators hosted by the Bulgarian Government were among the organizational activities of the group. Countries actively participated in the sharing of experience, knowledge, skills, solutions and information on significant events and countermeasures taken to ward off the bug.

Our crisis strategy went through a staged process involving the identification of vulnerable sectors, risk assessment, the remediation of critical systems and software and the development of contingency plans. The group implemented a comprehensive Y2K plan to facilitate decision-making in the event of the crisis. We focused on the following priority areas: energy, telecommunications, nuclear power, banking, finance, oil, gas, shipping and ports and aviation. To handle the complex issues, we concentrated on anticipation, preparation, the prevention of panic, and responsiveness to emerging problems. We supported the use of standardized public status reports and coordinated the preparation efforts with the International Y2K Cooperation Centre.

As a result of the extensive preparedness at both regional and national levels, the region managed a smooth transition to the year 2000, and no major Y2K-related problems have been reported.

The solution of the Y2K problem for the Bulgarian Government means the achievement of pragmatic goals — protection of the physical integrity of the citizens, protection of crucial components of the social and economic infrastructure and minimizing the potential losses to the lowest possible.

Starting work on the Y2K challenge at the beginning of 1998, we also made intensive efforts to build real public confidence about the measures taken to resolve the problem. There were many messages to citizens within the public information programme. Transparency, open discussion and public right to information are of crucial importance, because they raise the awareness level and prevent panic among the population. The coordination with the private sector was one of the most important measures undertaken by my Government to ensure the successful Y2K transition.

The preparation for the Y2K project, the collaboration and solidarity forged by the common concerns among developed and developing countries, system agencies, international and regional Y2K centres, Governments, business and industry proved to be, as Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette put it, the United Nations in action.

In this regard, one of the most remarkable results is the general awareness reached throughout the United Nations system about the importance of the communications revolution and the need to harness its potential, to meet together its new challenges.

Let me conclude by expressing my sincere hope that we will continue our activities in the same spirit of understanding and constructive cooperation.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. We will proceed to consider draft resolution A/55/L.28.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.28. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/55/L.28 was adopted (resolution 55/21).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 44?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 180

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States

Draft resolution (A/55/L.6/Rev.1)

The Acting President: I call on Mr. Santiago Nsobeya Efuman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Equatorial Guinea, to introduce the draft resolution.

Mr. Nsobeya Efuman (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The draft resolution, "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States", is sponsored by the following countries: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Belgium, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

I would like to express the deep gratitude of the member countries of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which my country, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, has the honour to represent, for this historic opportunity to institutionalize, in the multisectoral context, cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States.

On behalf of the countries of the Community and their respective heads of State, the current Chairman of the Community, His Excellency Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, and myself, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the addition of this item on cooperation between the United Nations and the Community to the agenda. Our thanks also go to all the members of the Bureau for supporting our request.

To introduce a constructive dynamic into the debate, I would like to tell the General Assembly that in speaking about formal cooperation between the United Nations and ECCAS we are not discussing an entirely new subject, since the United Nations has been signing cooperation agreements with other African regional economic communities intended to develop the five pillars within the framework of the construction of the African Economic Community, the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Other universal, regional or subregional institutions maintain fruitful cooperation with the United Nations. What has changed fundamentally, thanks to the existence of the United Nations, is the irreversibility of the phenomenon of the globalization that is transforming our world. This is leading to, above all, increasing interdependence and extraordinary complexity in our evolution.

Cooperation with the United Nations, for which Central Africa is pressing, will come at a time when reforms are being introduced into the Organization to better adapt it to the new requirements of the world.

In this new context, while expressing gratitude for the positive contribution of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa for its contribution to restoring confidence among the member States of the Community, the heads of State recommended at the special summit of 23 June 2000, held in Libreville, Gabon, a stronger and more sustained presence of the United Nations alongside ECCAS and the establishment in that context of direct, multisectoral cooperation between the United Nations system and the Community to promote economic development and integration, as well as to promote peace, stability, democracy and respect for human rights in the subregion.

But it is also an invitation to work for building an increasingly fairer world, one with greater solidarity, one that will reflect the principles of the Charter to which our peoples and nations are committed — principles that our heads of State and Government have reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration and unanimously adopted during the Millennium Summit held in New York in September.

We know that the scenario is daunting, but our determination is on a par with the challenge. We have found that in order to succeed we must reinforce our subregional institution. This was the spirit of the commitment and of the decisions taken by ECCAS heads of State and Government during the Malabo Summit in June 1999, whose main objective was to give ECCAS the ways and means fully to discharge its

role of coordinator and catalyst of the integration under way in our subregion.

Within that general context I would like now to briefly introduce the draft resolution which is presented for the Assembly's consideration. The preamble summarizes the following ideas.

First, it relates to the statute of ECCAS and the objectives established by its members. We find the same idea expressed in the fourth preambular paragraph, which recalls the importance of the ninth regular session of ECCAS, where our States decided to resume the activities of ECCAS and give it the necessary tools to discharge its mandate.

Secondly, mention is made of the establishment of a Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The creation of this Committee has in fact been a decisive step in the establishment of broader cooperation with the United Nations. The work programme, thanks to the support of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, has made it possible to have better cooperation and political coordination by our States.

Thirdly, the importance of the Millennium Declaration is underscored.

Fourthly, we recall our confidence in the action of the United Nations and our conviction that its support and experience are indispensable resources for the achievement of our objectives of peace, security and development.

Furthermore, in the operative part, it is intended to request, through the establishment of cooperation between the United Nations and ECCAS, support from the world Organization to help our States deal with the challenges that globalization and instability pose to its development. We find this concern specifically addressed in the first and second paragraphs.

In the third paragraph, the General Assembly reaffirms the wisdom of the support that the Secretary-General contributes to members of ECCAS aimed at reinforcing confidence and the possibility of establishing a climate of peace in which to promote the rule of law and democratic values. I should like to recall here that this support required the establishment of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa and it has helped to mitigate the absence of an instrument for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

With the creation of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, this institutional shortcoming has been solved. However, in order to carry out its missions effectively, our young institution will need the sustained support of the United Nations. In this specific field, we are working to avoid all kinds of overlapping. For reasons of coordination and rationalization, we will in future attempt to deal with issues of peace and security, traditionally dealt with within the framework of the Advisory Committee, as a part of the overall cooperation between the United Nations and the ECCAS.

The fourth paragraph reinforces this idea and mentions the fields where sustained support is indispensable to ensure the success of the initiatives undertaken by the countries of Central Africa aimed at the creation of conditions for peace and sustainable development in the subregion.

This same request is reaffirmed in the fifth paragraph, which stresses the need for coordinated action by the entire United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, for questions that have to do with the debt which is undermining the efforts of the countries of Central Africa.

The sixth paragraph reinforces this idea, calling on the international community to bring about greater synergy in support of the determination of the countries of Central Africa to establish a climate of peace and security favourable to investment and economic and social progress, which are indispensable for the wellbeing of the peoples of the subregion.

The seventh, eighth and ninth paragraphs are intended to ensure the permanence of this growing cooperation and to allow it time to mature and produce all of the results that we hope for.

It is encouraging that the examination of this point was part of the Millennium Assembly, which produced an important declaration that guides the development of our Organization into the twenty-first century.

We welcome the fact that the heads of State and Government of the United Nations have especially underscored the imperative need to support efforts leading to the consolidation of democracy, peace and development in Africa.

Solemnly stating today to the Member States of the United Nations the determination of Central Africa

to play a bigger role in the dynamics of globalization, we are fully aware of the fact that we will be better able to achieve success if we can count on the solidarity and support of the entire United Nations system.

Mr. Doutriaux (France) *(spoke in French)*: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union, the Central and East European countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The other associated countries, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey align themselves with this statement.

The inclusion of this new item on the agenda is entirely justified. Subregional integration is under way in Africa and is clearly increasingly becoming a fact of life in that continent. This is something the United Nations must continue to support, for it may, after all, make a useful contribution to achieving the goals of the Charter.

The European Union also encourages the development of integration in Africa. The European Union/Africa Summit held in Cairo on 4 April was an opportunity to state that very clearly. The European Union sees this as one of the keys to development and stability in Africa. Of course, for the continent as a whole, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) plays an irreplaceable role, as it has done for several decades, but account must also be taken of the additional contribution to be made by subregional organizations as forums where African solidarity can be expressed. Subregional organizations have, of course, an economic role to play, but they have gradually come to expand their interests to include questions related to security and peacekeeping. In both areas, good cooperation with the United Nations is essential. It is based on respect for the provisions of the Charter and, particularly, the authority of the Security Council regarding the use of force.

From this standpoint, since its creation in 1983, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) has developed very well. Early this year it set for itself the political objectives of peacekeeping and of establishing a community parliament and the subregional centre for human rights and democracy. With the creation of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, ECCAS has given itself a body that should allow it to satisfy its legitimate aspirations in the area of peacekeeping.

The European Union wishes to contribute in a practical way to strengthening ECCAS and its links with the United Nations. Several European States have already taken part in strengthening peacekeeping capabilities in the subregion. In February 2000 the multinational exercise called Gabon 2000 brought together 10 ECCAS countries. One of its main goals was to familiarize the States of the subregion with United Nations peacekeeping procedures to enable them to participate in peacekeeping operations or in multinational forces authorized by the Security Council. This is the kind of cooperation that should be encouraged in the future, as well as other partnerships to strengthen peacekeeping capability, democracy and sound public administration in the region. The European Union will lend its support to these efforts.

Mr. Moungara-Moussotsi (Gabon) *(spoke in French)*: I would like to state at the outset that the Gabonese delegation fully supports the statement made earlier by Mr. Santiago Nsobeya Efuman, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Francophonie of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, on behalf of the member States of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

I am particularly pleased that the inclusion of agenda item 180, "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States", coincides with the ECCAS restructuring process, as decided by the African leaders of our subregion at the Malabo summit on 24 June 1999.

As the representative of the ECCAS host country, I wish to take this opportunity to confirm Gabon's commitment to revitalizing this important subregional institution. Providing ECCAS once again with the means to function normally means offering it every opportunity to be the real motor for subregional integration and the primary tool for the establishment and consolidation of peace in Central Africa. The new momentum given to ECCAS is also designed to put an end to the contradiction of one of the potentially richest subregions of Africa being also the least stable. Too many armed conflicts, at times between founding members of our Community, continue to affect Central Africa. This deeply regrettable situation prevents ECCAS from fully contributing to the economic

recovery of the countries of our subregion and Africa in general.

In their efforts to strengthen peace in Central Africa, our heads of State or Government, in creating the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), wished to give ECCAS a new capacity for action in the areas of conflict prevention and management. The same concern led them to establish the early warning mechanism in Central Africa. Gabon, chosen by the other member States to host the headquarters of this instrument for prevention of armed conflict in Central Africa, has already taken steps to make available to ECCAS the building that will accommodate the early warning mechanism.

The draft resolution before us today reflects perfectly the firm will of our States to build a community of peaceful and prosperous States, inspired by the common ideal of working together for the well-being of their respective peoples. It is also in keeping with the vision inspired by the conclusions of the recent Millennium Summit.

The idea of establishing a subregional parliament and a centre for human rights and democracy respond to a concern that is an ongoing priority of our subregion. Indeed, since the late 1980s, the consultations held between our States, with the invaluable assistance of the United Nations, led in 1992 to the establishment of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/37 B of 6 December 1991. Since then the Standing Advisory Committee has been a very useful tool whose Secretariat has played a leading role in establishing confidence-building measures among the States of the subregion.

For example, in June 1996, it witnessed the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact between the States of Central Africa and organized important meetings, such as the one on small arms that took place in Chad in October 1999 and the one held recently in Burundi on refugees. The Committee's meetings have also provided a framework for reflection on the drafting and adoption of mechanisms such as the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, the early warning mechanism, the subregional parliament and the centre for human rights and democracy, which I referred to earlier.

However, we are convinced that in a world driven by the forces of globalization, the success and continuation of a subregional experiment in such sensitive areas as the consolidation of peace, the promotion of democratic values and institutions and human rights, the fight against illicit arms traffic or economic integration and development demand the sustained attention and support of the United Nations and the international community.

Convinced of this need, we have deemed it fitting to institutionalize the cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States. In this context, we would like to appeal not only to the traditional partners of the subregion, but also to this community of nations, to express firm support for the attainment of the goals set by ECCAS in the context of this draft resolution.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We will now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.6/Rev.1.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.6/Rev.1?

Draft resolution A/55/L.6/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 55/22).

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 180?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.55 p.m.